



Town of Groton, Connecticut

45 Fort Hill Road
Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

Meeting Minutes

Representative Town Meeting

Moderator Jean-Claude Ambroise, Representatives Karin Adams, Scott W. Aument, Sr., Joseph Baril, Nancy E. Barnhart, Alicia Bauer, Genevieve Cerf, Susan Chase-Hildebrand, Michael Collins, Christine Conley, Susan Deane-Shinbrot, Luanne E. DeMatto, Nancy Driscoll, Dave Ferreira, Neal Gardner, Patrice Granatosky, Dolores Harrell, Karen Hatcher, Keith L. Hedrick, Jonathan Heller, Lynn Crockett Hubbard, Michael Dean Johnson, Rosanne E. Kotowski, Jim Loughlin, Elizabeth Luck, Jackie Massett, Bruce A. McDermott, Roscoe Merritt, Constance Miller, Scott Newsome, Richard J. Pasqualini, Jr., Betty A. Prochaska, Pam Ryley, Jack Sebastian, Dana S. Semeraro, Joan Steinfeld, Irma Streeter, Mark Svencer, Archie C. Swindell, Lori A. Watrous and Ivy R. Williams

Wednesday, February 8, 2012

7:30 PM

Groton Senior Center

Regular Meeting

A. ROLL CALL

Moderator Jean-Claude Ambroise called the meeting to order at 7:33p.m.

28 members were present, and a quorum was declared.

The Moderator reported that Reps. Driscoll, Harrell, Hedrick, Johnson, McDermott, Sebastian and Semeraro notified the Town Clerk's office of their absence.

Members Present: Moderator Ambroise, Rep. Adams, Rep. Aument, Rep. Baril, Rep. Barnhart, Rep. Bauer, Rep. Cerf, Rep. Chase-Hildebrand, Rep. Collins, Rep. Conley, Rep. Deane-Shinbrot, Rep. DeMatto, Rep. Ferreira, Rep. Gardner, Rep. Granatosky, Rep. Hatcher, Rep. Heller, Rep. Kotowski, Rep. Massett, Rep. Miller, Rep. Pasqualini Jr., Rep. Prochaska, Rep. Ryley, Rep. Steinfeld, Rep. Streeter, Rep. Swindell, Rep. Watrous and Rep. Williams

Members Absent: Rep. Driscoll, Rep. Harrell, Rep. Hedrick, Rep. Hubbard, Rep. Johnson, Rep. Loughlin, Rep. Luck, Rep. McDermott, Rep. Merritt, Rep. Newsome, Rep. Semeraro, Rep. Sebastian and Rep. Svencer

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Superintendent of Schools Paul Kadri, Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher and Assistant Town Clerk Sally Whitney.

B. MOMENT OF SILENCE AND SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The members observed a moment of silence followed by the Salute to the Flag led by Rep. Ferreira.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF DECEMBER 14, 2011

A motion that the minutes be approved was made by Rep. Pasqualini, seconded by Rep. Adams.

The vote to approve the minutes carried 27 in favor, 1 abstention. (Abstaining: Rep. Barnhart.)

D. CITIZENS' PETITIONS

None.

E. RECEPTION OF COMMUNICATIONS

Moderator Ambroise read the letters that he sent on behalf of the RTM Consolidation Committee to the Board of Education and the Town Council. He noted that copies of the letters are available for members' review.

The Moderator announced that Rep. DeMatto will serve as the RTM Liaison to the Economic Development Commission.

The Town Clerk reported that Superintendent Kadri is attending a Board of Education Budget meeting and may be arriving later in the meeting. She noted that Rep. Svencer had to leave after the RTM Temporary Rules Committee meeting.

F. REPORT OF THE TOWN MANAGER**1. Financial report**

Mr. Oefinger reported that the Fund Balance as of June 30, 2011 is approximately \$10.1 million; the General Contingency balance is \$350,000; the Capital Reserve balance is \$1,020,567. The increase is attributable to interest income and recording fees.

2. Monthly briefing

The Town Manager highlighted various items from the Town Manager's News. Mr. Oefinger reported that good news was received today after the Governor's budget address; the Town of Groton is expected to receive a 1% increase in State funds, which equates to approximately \$250,000.

In response to Rep. Cerf, the Town Manager stated that since Federal Energy Assistance funding has declined, the amount of assistance granted to families has been reduced significantly this year. He noted that he can provide the number of requests for assistance and the number of residents using the program. He mentioned that there is a tremendous need for donations since the shortfall in funding is accompanied by a rise in cost of heating oil.

G. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Upon his arrival at 8:55 p.m., School Superintendent Kadri announced that the Board of Education (BOE) intends to forward a 0% increase budget to the Town Council. This was accomplished by current fiscal year savings and projected savings next year due to consolidation of middle schools, fewer health insurance claims, and utilization of federal stimulus funds for certain software and material purchases. He explained the steps in the consolidation process that is ongoing to align the facilities and staff for the 2012-2013 school year.

H. LIAISON REPORTS**Town Council / Board of Education/RTM - Lori Watrous**

Rep. Watrous attended the joint meeting on January 30, 2012. She reported that the Superintendent's proposed budget for 2012-2013 has a zero dollar increase. A supplemental appropriation of \$1.3 million is being requested to cover costs for consolidation of the middle schools. She explained that the money will be spent on renovations to Cutler and West Side Middle Schools as well as the purchase of three permanently installed portable classrooms. She noted that the request for grants cannot be submitted until money for the project has been appropriated. A retreat of the Town Council and Board of Education is tentatively scheduled for February 11, 2012 to discuss the Vision Committee report if State legislators are able to attend.

I. COMMITTEE REPORTS**1. FINANCE - Chairman Granatosky**

Chairman Granatosky read the minutes of the meeting held on February 2, 2012. (Minutes are attached to the permanent record.)

Motion to approve the minutes was made by Rep. Granatosky, seconded by Rep. DeMatto.

The Town Manager clarified his comments in the minutes to reflect that he was questioning Rep. Sebastian's use of the inflation numbers on his spreadsheet titled "Groton Grand Levy History vice Inflation."

Rep. Kotowski asked that the section of minutes mentioning past letters sent by the RTM be clarified. Chairman Granatosky reread the section of minutes concerning past RTM letters sent by consensus.

The vote to approve the minutes carried 26 in favor, 2 abstentions. (Abstaining: Reps. Cerf and Swindell.)

2011-0245**Letter re zero tax increase budget**

Letter re zero tax increase budget

A motion was made by Rep. Kotowski, seconded by Rep. Gardner, that this matter be Adopted.

Rep. Kotowski feels strongly that the RTM should send letters to the Town Council and Board of Education (BOE) encouraging a 0% tax increase budget.

Rep. Kotowski stated that her rationale is that the Town needs to curtail spending, eliminate contributions to CIP accounts and incur no additional bonding expenses. She stated that the BOE Central Office salaries are not sustainable based on the increases received over the last several years.

Rep. Steinfeld raised a "Point of Order", stating that she objects to this motion based on the acceptance of the report from the RTM Finance Committee which recommends no action on this item.

Moderator Ambrose explained that it is the privilege of each member to place a motion on the floor and then to provide rationale.

Members discussed several items: salary increases for BOE employees; salary increases for the Public Works Director and the Planning Director; the proposed zero increase BOE budget request for FYE 2013; the short-sightedness of zeroing contributions to CIP; the need to improve economic growth and increase revenue sources.

Rep. Swindell stated he will not support the motion on the floor as it is impossible for the Town Council and BOE to create a no tax increase budget for all taxpayers.

The Town Manager noted that taxes increased slightly last year. This was due to a slight budget increase and a decline in revenue. He stated that the continued decline in revenue necessitates either an increase in taxes or a cut in services. He admitted that the tax burden has shifted to residential property, but the residential tax burden remains less than in surrounding communities. He noted that the Town of Groton is fortunate in regard to its sizable industrial tax base. He offered to provide additional information similar to that which he provided at the RTM Orientation meeting.

Motion to Move the Question was made by Rep. Adams, seconded by Rep. Pasqualini. The vote on moving the question carried 25 in favor, 3 opposed. (Opposed: Reps. Kotowski, Swindell and Ambrose.)

The motion failed by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 5 - Rep. Aument, Rep. Deane-Shinbrot, Rep. Gardner, Rep. Kotowski and Rep. Williams
Opposed: 3 - Moderator Ambrose, Rep. Adams, Rep. Baril, Rep. Barnhart, Rep. Bauer, Rep. Cerf, Rep. Chase-Hildebrand, Rep. Collins, Rep. Conley, Rep. DeMatto, Rep. Ferreira, Rep. Granatosky, Rep. Hatcher, Rep. Heller, Rep. Massett, Rep. Miller, Rep. Pasqualini Jr., Rep. Prochaska, Rep. Ryley, Rep. Steinfeld, Rep. Streeter, Rep. Swindell and Rep. Watrous

2012-0052

RTM Involvement in Broadening Town Revenue Base

INVESTIGATION INTO HOW RTM CAN BE INVOLVED IN BROADENING THE TOWN'S REVENUE BASE

This matter was Referred to the RTM Community Development & Services Committee.

Rep. Swindell stated that the RTM is responsible for controlling expenditures. He feels that the Town needs to focus on improving revenue by increasing the local tax base by encouraging more business. He noted that there has been significant downsizing of some major taxpayers in the Town.

2. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & SERVICES - Chairman Ferreira

No meeting, no report.

3. EDUCATION - Chairman Hedrick

No meeting, no report.

4. RECREATION - Chairman Streeter

No meeting, no report.

5. PUBLIC SAFETY - Chairman Pasqualini

No meeting, no report.

6. PUBLIC WORKS - Chairman Collins

No meeting, no report.

7. TEMPORARY RULES & PROCEDURES - Chairman Svencer

In the absence of Chairman Svencer, Rep. DeMatto read the minutes of the meeting held on February 8, 2012. (Minutes are attached to the permanent record.)

Motion to approve the minutes was made by Rep. DeMatto, seconded by Rep. Barnhart.

Rep. Ferreira requested clarification on the committee's discussion of email notification to the RTM.

Town Clerk Mouwkasher explained that lack of compatible software could pose problems for email notification. In addition, procedural change is sometimes slow and difficult. She stated that Rep. Conley will participate with the Town Clerk in an experiment to test email notification. If this is successful, email notification could be an option and a referral to the Rules & Procedures Committee would be made to explore amending Section 4.1 of the RTM Rules.

In response to Rep. Aument's concern about section 8.1 Conflict of Interest, it was explained that the current language complies with Roberts Rules and that a change of "may disqualify" to "could disqualify" or "shall disqualify" is not necessary.

The vote to approve the minutes carried 27 in favor, 1 abstention. (Abstaining: Rep. Gardner.)

2012-0027 Rules for Twenty-Eighth RTM

RESOLUTION ADOPTING RULES FOR THE TWENTY-EIGHTH REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Rules of the Twenty-Eighth Representative Town Meeting as recommended by the Temporary Rules & Procedures Committee are hereby adopted.

A motion was made by Rep. DeMatto, seconded by Rep. Massett, that this matter be Adopted.

In response to Reps. Barnhart and Swindell, the Town Clerk clarified that current RTM notification is unchanged and that an experiment with Rep. Conley is being initiated to evaluate the use of email notification and possibly achieve future cost savings.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 27 - Moderator Ambroise, Rep. Adams, Rep. Aument, Rep. Baril, Rep. Barnhart, Rep. Bauer, Rep. Cerf, Rep. Chase-Hildebrand, Rep. Collins, Rep. Conley, Rep. Deane-Shinbrot, Rep. DeMatto, Rep. Ferreira, Rep. Granatosky, Rep. Hatcher, Rep. Heller, Rep. Kotowski, Rep. Massett, Rep. Miller, Rep. Pasqualini Jr., Rep. Prochaska, Rep. Ryley, Rep. Steinfeld, Rep. Streeter, Rep. Swindell, Rep. Watrous and Rep. Williams
Opposed: 1 - Rep. Gardner

8. CONSOLIDATION - Chairman Pasqualini

No meeting, no report.

J. OTHER BUSINESS

Members discussed the status of the investigation into the additional \$150,000 expenditure for the

new baseball field at Fitch High School and whether those responsible will be disciplined or terminated.

The Town Manager commented that the Town Council and BOE made a joint decision to pay for the additional work to complete the project using Department of Defense funds. These are not Town funds. He declined further comment due to potential litigation.

Rep. Kotowski commented about a recent New London Day article that reported that the Southeastern region of the State is the slowest to recover from the current recession and is suffering with a higher unemployment rate. She feels that the school administrators' contract should be renegotiated.

K. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn at 9:03 p.m. was made by Rep. Pasqualini, seconded by Rep. Barnhart and so voted unanimously.

Attest:

*Betsy Moukawsher, Town Clerk
Clerk of the RTM*

Sally A. Whitney, Assistant Town Clerk